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ON THE RIGHT:

Trying to Guess Warren's Secret

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MAKE IT a point to ask those I meet who are concerned with the investigation by the Warren Commission into the death of President Kennedy: What can Mr. Warren have had in mind when he uttered those resonant words a month ago, that in our lifetime we shall not know some of the things the Commission has learned about the assassination?

There is no common guess. Different people give widely different guesses. The Chief Justice has given no satisfactory explanation for his enigmatic and provocative statement. But what an effect it has had! In Europe, it serves as the cornerstone of the belief which holds that the assassination was not simply the aberrational act of a lone killer, but rather a collective endeavor.

I have heard many versions of what Warren might have had in mind, as you undoubtedly have. Some are inherently preposterous (e.g., "It was a plot of the Dallas Police Department, and America is trying to save face by burying the story"); some heavily technical ("The security arrangements were loused up. The Secret Service knew all about Oswald, but neglected to run him in, and we dare not confess to this terrible act of negligence"); some churlish ("Warren had in mind disgraceful behavior by members of the Presidential party in the motorcade").

One answer I had from a former member of the Central Intelligence Agency strikes me as plausible enough to wish to share with you. My friend, intensively schooled in espionage, reasons as follows:

Oswald had spent many months in the Soviet Union, not because he liked the landscape there, but because he had declared himself in essential sympathy with communism. Granted that he tired of life in Minsk; but he never renounced his fidelity to communism. It is clear from his behavior on his return to this country, where he espoused the cause of Castro's Cuba, that his political allegiance had not changed away from communism.

That being the case, my friend said, the chances are overwhelming that before he left Russia the Soviet Union had recruited him as an agent.

It is important to understand just what this means. The recruitment of agents does not presuppose that one has in mind the execution of any particular act by that agent. It is often a purely routine matter.



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A secret service, spotting a man sympathetic to one's government who is about to emigrate to the enemy country, will enter into a loose arrangement with him, redeemable at some future moment, when and if a suitable occasion should arise.

The Soviet Union might very well have recruited Oswald as an agent—in the sense of arriving at an understanding with him that if he might be found especially useful, the secret service would get in touch with him.

There are thousands of such persons in America, who have come in from behind the Iron Curtain, my friend advises me; and there are a number of such who have left the United States to live in Russia.

Consider, now, the event of Nov. 22, 1963. Kennedy shot dead and Oswald apprehended. Assume that the Soviet Secret Police search their records and find Oswald had been recruited as a secret agent. Suppose, further, that the Soviet government knew that United States counter-spies had penetrated the arrangement, and knew Oswald had been formally recruited; or that, if the U.S. government did not know it might find out about it imminently.

If we assume, as I most decidedly do, that the Soviet Secret Service did not give Oswald orders to kill the President, one can imagine the consternation in the Kremlin on the afternoon of Nov. 22.

Suppose their routine arrangement with Oswald were to become public knowledge! Imagine the public uproar in the United States!

Might not Khrushchev have communicated immediately with the new President to say: We confess we had Oswald as a stringer, but so help us, we gave him no order to assassinate the President of the United States. Johnson, almost surely, would have responded gratefully (why should he initiate his tenure with an apocalyptic confrontation with the Soviet Union as defendant in an act of magnicide)—and nervously (how profoundly important to keep away from the inflammable imagination of the American people, details of the formal connection between Oswald and the Kremlin).

That, the hypothesis suggests, is what Warren had in mind, when he spoke of the necessity that the American people wait a generation or so before they are told the background of the assassination.

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